

Press release — 30 April 2015

Conceptual artist Helen Kirwan's *Fragment and Trace* presented by the European Cultural Centre during the 56th Biennale di Venezia, 2015

Conceptual artist Helen Kirwan will be exhibiting her latest work, *Fragment and Trace* at Personal Structures - Crossing Borders, an exhibition presented by the European Cultural Centre, organised by the Global Art Affairs Foundation during the 56th Biennale di Venezia 2015. This is the artist's second participation in a group show at the European Cultural Centre during the Biennale.

Fragment and Trace is a two channel video installation about a person mourning the sudden loss of a loved one. In mourning, she paces across a sparse, featureless landscape in the autumn and in winter. She picks stems off dead weeds and places sticks in the snow to measure the ground. This absurd and futile task reveals a form of inward keening.

Through these repetitive and meditative tasks she aims to summon her loved one back to consciousness, shifting memories of the past into an experience of the present. She knows the futility of this process; it's absurdity and its exquisite agony.

Mourning and the portrayal of grief are central to Kirwan's work. Drawing on her own experience of a sudden and unsettling loss, she wants to portray "the physical traces of mourning, which manifest themselves through absurd and futile activity".

In *Fragment and Trace* the artist investigates the philosophical concept of the "fragment", as understood by the late 18th century German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. The fragment, according to Schlegel, was a literary form which, due to its fragmentary nature, opened up questions about the relation between the finite and infinite, unity and chaos.

Describing the influence of the fragment in her own work, Kirwan explains: "It is the pursuit of that which is apparently elusive. This is not necessarily in order to achieve a goal at the end, but to consider *the thing that cannot be held*".

The scenes were shot in Flanders, Kent and Iceland. The artist sought out landscapes that were sparse and flat. Kirwan herself plays the woman in mourning. The cinematographer for this project was Simon Pruciak, and Kirwan collaborated with award-winning contemporary composer Tom Lane to create a sound piece, which reflects the video's inwardness and indeterminate pace.

Fragment and Trace is Kirwan's second work to be part of a group show during the Biennale di Venezia. In 2013, Kirwan, participated in artist David Goldenberg's post-autonomy project 'The Transformation of Art' shown in Personal Structures at the Palazzo Bembo during the the 55th Biennale di Venezia during which she presented her video *Venetian Drift* made with artist Jane Madsen.

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Notes to editors: About the artist

Helen Kirwan is a British - Irish conceptual artist. She practised law as a barrister in Dublin and London for nearly twenty years before becoming an artist full time. She took a B.A. First Class Honours in Fine Art at the University for the Creative Arts Canterbury in 2000 followed by an M.F.A. in Fine Art Practice from the University of Middlesex, London in 2002 and in 2004, an M.A. in Aesthetics and Art Theory at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, which is now at Kingston University London.

Kirwan's practice explores mourning and the portrayal of grief, drawing on her own experience of a sudden and unsettling loss. Experimenting with different media, from installation, to moving image, drawing and mapping, she aims to portray "the physical traces of mourning, which manifest themselves through absurd and futile activity". Recurring themes in her work are *memory* and *memorial*, as well as *fragment* and *trace*.

Kirwan's work is informed by early German Romanticism, particularly the work of the writer and poet Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829). Schlegel's understanding of the fragment as a literary form, reveals a deep subjective idealism which the artist draws on in her work. Kirwan has delivered lectures on Schlegel's concept of the fragment, and early German Romanticism.

In 2014, Kirwan created the video installation *Sadness of Farewell* with Simon Pruciak exhibited during the Folkestone Triennial fringe. It was inspired by Alfred Tennyson's poem 'Crossing the Bar' (1889) in which the poet contemplates his transition from life to death in terms of putting out to sea. The video's deadpan images of the sea and the horizon portray the sea as an apeiron: infinite and boundless, beyond the imagination or concept of 'man'.

Kirwan also set up *Image of the Road*, a collaborative research project with Pruciak which visually documented the European Union's E40 Highway, from France to Kazakhstan. During the trip the artists captured daily movement along the road, ambient sounds, conversations and interviews at service stations.

In 2013, Kirwan, participated in artist David Goldenberg's post-autonomy project *The Transformation of Art* shown in Personal Structures at the Palazzo Bembo during the the 55th Biennale di Venezia and presented her video *Venetian Drift* made with artist Jane Madsen in that project.

Kirwan is a member of the Post Autonomy Group. In 2002, she founded Cultural Operations and Services (**COS projects**). The aim was to create and rethink socially engaged art. She also works as **B+K** with artist Dr. Mary-lou Barratt. Founded in 1997 whilst both studying at the University for the Creative Arts Canterbury, it aims for a shared exploration and questioning of contemporary art practices, to interrogate and test collaborative strategies and approaches and the language framing such practices.

<http://www.cosprojects.co.uk/>

About Tom Lane

Tom Lane is a Dublin-based composer, *singer and multi-instrumentalist*. He studied music at Balliol College Oxford, composition at the London Royal Academy of Music, and composition and experimental music theatre at the University of the Arts Berlin. His compositions and soundscapes, many award winning, are widely performed in Europe. Work in 2014 includes *Twelfth Night* (Abbey Theatre, Dublin), *Harp, a river cantata* (Ulysses Opera Theatre) and *King Lear* (Irish Modern Dance Theatre directed by John Scott).

<http://www.tom-lane.com/>

About Personal Structures - Crossing Borders

In the context of la Biennale di Venezia 2015, the European Cultural Centre presents its opening exhibition Personal Structures - Crossing Borders in two of its prestigious Palazzo's in Venice, Palazzo Bembo and Palazzo Mora. The exhibition shows an extensive combination of established artists and artists whose practice is less known. Not only artists who are considered "the best", but a cross section of what can be seen as art today. The artists, although mainly from Europe, come from many different parts of the world and are expressing themselves in various ways. Visually, the artworks may appear very different. Their common ground is the artist's subjective, personal expression of his or her reflection on the concepts Time, Space and Existence.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.palazzobembo.org/index.php?page=37&lang=en>

9th May - 22nd November 2015

Opening times: 10am - 6pm; Monday - Sunday; CLOSED Thursdays

Free Entry

Preview dates: Thursday 7 and Friday 8 May 2015; 10am - 6pm

Location: Palazzo Bembo, Riva del Carbon # 4793, 30124 Venezia, Italy

<http://www.personalstructures.org/>

About Global Art Affairs Foundation

The Global Art Affairs Foundation is a Dutch non-profit organization that aims to heighten the awareness about the more philosophical themes in contemporary art and architecture, in particular: Time – Space – Existence, and make these subjects more accessible to a wider international audience. In order to achieve this goal, they organise exhibitions, symposia, publish extensively and create art projects.

<http://www.globalartaffairs.org/>

For further enquiries and images please contact: [**info@cosprojects.co.uk**](mailto:info@cosprojects.co.uk)

